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INQUIRY BY WALSH SAID TO SCRUTINIZE HIGH U.S. OFFICIALS

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WASHINGTON, April 28 — The special prosecutor in the Iran-contra affair said today that his investigation covered "high Government officials" as well as others and gave his strongest indication to date that he would seek indictments.

In a report to Congress, Mr. Walsh noted that "high Government officials" were involved in the case "and the investigations have received intense national attention — except perhaps for Watergate, the situation is virtually unprecedented."

He also restated his warning that additional grants of Congressional immunity would jeopardize his prosecutions, and he rebutted charges by lawmakers that his inquiry was moving too slowly.

The 17-page interim report said that the investigation was "progressing and accelerating" and had turned up "extensive and specific evidence."

Scope of Inquiries

According to the report, "ongoing investigations" are being conducted at the White House, the office of Vice President Bush and eight other Federal agencies and offices. Among them are the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Justice Department and the Defense Department.

The report did not indicate the nature of the investigations at the agencies. A Government official with knowledge of the investigation said that current officials at a number of those agencies were suspects in the investigation.

Although he referred to possible action against "high Government officials," Mr. Walsh did not name them in the report.

Two officials said that Mr. Walsh was referring to current and former officials who had served at senior reports in Government.

As the investigation proceeded today, President Reagan discussed one of the key figures in the case, Rear Adm. John M. Poindexter, who resigned in November as the White House national security adviser. In an interview with six newspaper reporters, Mr. Reagan called Admiral Poindexter "an honorable man" and speculated that the admiral had not told him about money funneled to Nicaraguan rebels because "he thought he was being, in some way, protective of me."

'I Was Not Informed'

The President said he was not worried that Admiral Poindexter would tell Congress that Mr. Reagan knew about the diversion. "I was not informed," the President repeated.

On Capitol Hill today, lawmakers said the first witness at the Congressional hearings on the Iran-contra affair would be either Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord, a retired Air Force officer who played a key role in the case, or Robert C. McFarlane, another former national security adviser. The hearings begin next Tuesday.

Mr. Walsh's report today was his most complete account of the scope of his four-month-old investigation. Under the 1978 law that provided for the appointment of special prosecutors, Mr. Walsh is allowed to make periodic public reports on his activities.

800 Interviews Conducted

In the report, Mr. Walsh said that "most lines of inquiry are proving fruitful." His 73-member staff, he said, had reviewed more than 200,000 pages of Central Intelligence Agency documents and conducted 800 interviews.

Mr. Walsh, whose formal title is independent counsel, hinted that he would seek conspiracy charges against Government officials and others involved in a scheme to defraud the United States through arms sales to Iran and efforts to supply Nicaraguan rebels, who are known as contras.

Funds Unaccounted For

"The allegations in the investigation concern possible violations of public trust and possible misuse of position by high government officials and their manipulation by former Government officials," Mr. Walsh said.

"Large sums of public money are unaccounted for and those most knowledgeable resist public disclosure."

He noted that reports by a special Presidential review board and the Senate Intelligence Committee "portray an effort by a combination of certain Government officers, former Government officers and other individuals to supply military assistance to the contras notwithstanding the legal restrictions of Government support for such activities."

Rules Bar Prosecution

"Independent counsel must determine whether crimes were committed," he said.

Mr. Walsh also asked Congress, in

granting limited immunity to key suspects, to consider questions of potential corruption involving foreign officials. He seemed to be referring to bribery.

Under immunity rules, Mr. Walsh is barred from bringing indictments based on the testimony of a witness with immunity, or any leads produced by the testimony.

Much of Mr. Walsh's report appeared to be a response to recent charges by Senator Warren Rudman, the New Hampshire Republican who is vice chairman of the Senate committee investigating the Iran-contra affair.

Mr. Rudman has been quoted as saying that Mr. Walsh's investigation was moving too slowly and that the prosecution should perhaps be limited to obstruction of justice charges because conspiracy would be difficult to prove.

"This is not the time to narrow or conclude the grand jury process," Mr. Walsh responded. "The office of independent counsel and the grand jury have been proceeding at an accelerating rate and the acceleration promises to continue."

Senator Rudman and the committee's chairman, Senator Daniel K. Inouye, Democrat of Hawaii, issued a statement saying they were "surprised" by Mr. Walsh's assertion that additional immunity grants would jeopardize his prosecutions.

'Additional Grants of Immunity'

"We are not contemplating additional grants of immunity to other central figures," they said, referring to General Secord and others. "We are confident that the limited statutory use of immunity we have granted will not prevent prosecutions where crimes have been committed."

At a short meeting with reporters today, Mr. Walsh said he remained hopeful that Congress would not provide immunity to Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, the former White House aide who oversaw arms sales to Iran and the contra supply effort.

Senior members of the Congressional committees investigating the Iran-Contra affair met today with Israeli officials to discuss the handling of documents prepared for the panels by the Israeli Government, according to a Congressional official.

Israel has prepared a detailed chronology of the affair, but has not yet turned it over pending negotiations over how much of it will be made public and whether there would be guarantees of immunity from prosecution.

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